

# **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN WEST AFRICA: FINDINGS FROM A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## **Abstract**

The literature shows that leadership is the second most important factor influencing school and learner outcomes, including levels of literacy and numeracy, school leaving examination results, and progression to secondary and higher education. This paper focuses on school leadership in West Africa, drawing on a systematic review of the academic and 'grey' literature, commissioned by UNESCO. The aim of the desk research was to ascertain the state of school leadership at all levels. The paper shows that no West African countries provide specific preparation for school principals. It also shows that the predominant leadership style is managerial, with accountability to the hierarchy, within and beyond the school. The paper concludes that specific development programmes should be provided for current and aspiring principals.

**Key Words:** School leadership, Principals, West Africa, Leadership models, Managerial leadership, Leadership preparation

## **Introduction**

The international literature (e.g. Leithwood et al 2006, Robinson 2007) shows that leadership is the second most important factor influencing school and learner outcomes, after classroom teaching. Their work suggests that up to 27% of variation in learning outcomes is attributable to leadership. These findings are based largely on research in developed contexts but there is also some evidence (e.g. Bush and Oduro 2006) showing the significance of leadership in Africa and the potential change in measurable outcomes which can be derived from leadership development and stakeholder involvement in national education systems. This paper focuses on school leadership in West Africa, drawing on a systematic review of the academic and official ('grey') literature commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the desk research was to ascertain the state of school leadership at all levels, the regulatory frameworks in use or planned, the management of teaching and learning, proposals and practices for educator development, and emerging common interests in educational improvement.

The literature reviewed includes sources from seven specific national contexts, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, as well as material relating to the wider West

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, not UNESCO.

African context. This selection was agreed with UNESCO field officers and comprises countries of different sizes, wide-ranging GDPs, differing primary school participation rates, and varying degrees of urbanization. The selection was also influenced by the availability of recent relevant literature. Evidence is also drawn from general sub-Saharan literature, where it is especially relevant to school leadership in West Africa.

Literature reviews can be subjective in that selection is determined by the researcher, or that further selectivity leads to the use of data supporting a particular view. To address this problem, the authors made use of Evidence Informed Policy and Practice (EPPI) for the analysis of data arising from the search process. The approach involved using electronic database searching, hand searching of key journals, specialist websites, and general search engines such as 'Google' and 'Google scholar'. The databases included Swetsnet, Eric, British Educational Index, JStor and the journal archives of the South Africa Journal of Education, Africa Education Review and Perspectives in Education. These sources produced 883 references for initial scrutiny of abstracts. Following discussion with UNESCO, the review focused on sources from 2003, giving a ten-year period at the time of the review. Finer selection, based on fuller reading, then identified 178 articles and reports which were considered in greater detail. More than half of these (111) papers were directly relevant to the review, *because they focused on leadership, school headship, senior teams, and professional development*. These were cited in the UNESCO report (Bush and Glover 2013a). The country focus of the papers largely reflects their size, with 36 papers from Nigeria, 28 from Ghana and 11 from Cameroon, with three from Guinea and only two from Liberia. Twenty-four articles focused broadly on West Africa while seven have a wider international remit. The main subject foci of these papers were context (48), leadership (58), leadership and professional development (28), and stakeholder involvement (28). Sixteen sources comprised 'grey' literature, mostly government and UNICEF reports.

### **The West African Context**

The selection of literature, for West Africa and the seven specific countries, offers certain similarities in respect of poverty, religious tensions, and educational priorities. However, the literature also shows marked contextual differences, within and across countries, and this inhibits generalisations. *It would have been helpful to make distinctions between primary and secondary schools, and between urban and rural contexts, but the empirical sources reviewed provided insufficient detail to make valid comparisons.*

## Policy context

The Ibrahim Index (Rotberg 2009) provides criteria against which political, economic and social progress within African nations can be assessed. The constituent parts of the index are national security, stability of policies and procedures, participation in governance, sustainable economic opportunity, health and educational development. The failure of these to operate within parts of West Africa has hampered basic development through war, poverty, HIV/Aids, corruption and nepotism (Ibid: 117).

The ranking of West African countries on the Ibrahim scale shows that only Ghana and Benin appear in the top 20 countries whilst four are in the bottom ten of the 48 nations included in the index. This finding may serve to explain the low level from which educational development and school leadership can develop. Educational development, and the provision of public funding to secure such changes, can be illustrated by the experience of Ghana, which launched its Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) plan in 1996. The main policy goal of FCUBE was extending access to quality basic education to all school-age children in Ghana by the year 2005. FCUBE also aimed to promote effective teaching and learning, to provide adequate teaching and learning materials to schools in a timely way, and to improve teacher morale and motivation (Ministry of Education 1996).

As the 10-year deadline drew to a close, the goals of FCUBE had not been achieved, so other measures were explored and adopted to achieve Ghana's goal of universal basic education. Focusing on the economic challenges associated with school attendance, a School Capitation Grant Programme and a School Feeding Programme were launched in 2004 and 2005, linked to FCUBE. These programmes make attending school more feasible for many families (Sottie et al 2013: 378). However, Nudzor (2012), following a district case study, argues that basic education is not free, because of local funding problems, not compulsory, because of limited support to overcome non-attendance, and not universal, because of parental exclusion of girls in many areas.

The policy context, and its impact on socio-economic factors, strongly influences and conditions the educational context.

## The educational context

There are three major contextual factors which apply, to varying extents, in each country of West Africa, reflecting their educational and cultural development:

- Universal basic education
- National education systems
- Language issues

#### *Universal basic education*

All countries in West Africa are seeking to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal basic education but this is inhibited by a range of context-specific constraints. In Sierra Leone, for example, Banya and Elu (1998: 485) note the impact of civil war. They also comment that underfunding of physical and teaching resources, teacher dissatisfaction with conditions of service, and highly mobile populations, all rendered the plans 'worthless'. Similarly, Timelhi (2010: 187) refers to the 'poverty of resources' in Nigeria.

#### *National educational systems*

School organisation in West Africa varies according to tradition, local practice and funding arrangements. The balance of public and private schools is influenced by the presence of missionary schools in some urban areas, while public education predominates in rural contexts. In a study of the link between school organisation, culture, and effectiveness, in South-West Nigeria, Abari et al (2012: 15) surveyed 120 principals and 2,400 students from 10 public and 10 private schools. They found that private schools generally produced better examination results, but there were few other significant differences between school culture and effectiveness across the two sectors.

Haruna (2009: 947) notes how problems associated with the organisation and provision of schooling have been addressed in some areas through the provision of 'community' schools in Ghana, suggesting a different approach to leadership. This model 'acknowledges the strengths and contributions of all participants and partners . . . The model considers leadership within the broader social context in which individuals live and work, thereby enacting the meaning of leadership to bring about social-cultural impact in their communities'.

#### *Language issues*

Decisions on the language chosen as the medium of instruction are important in all West African contexts. In Ghana and Nigeria, there is widespread use of local languages in the first five years of basic education, with gradual awareness and use of French or English (Gilmour et al 2007). Ghiso

(2013: 22) argues that multi-cultural schooling requires dual language use in Liberia. The implementation of language policies has clear implications for principals and other school leaders. The resources available for educational development, including human and material resources, are strongly linked to the socio-economic context.

### The socio-economic context

The socio-economic context inevitably influences school leaders in West Africa. Bush and Oduro (2006: 360) categorise these contextual problems as low national and local income levels, the consequent pressures of poverty, minimal resource levels, and the associated paucity of buildings and ICT facilities. Industrial development, for example in the Delta region of Nigeria, and the Kono District of Sierra Leone, brings financial benefits and enhanced school resources, but these benefits do not extend to rural schools (Zulu and Wilson 2012). The recent Ebola crisis has exacerbated the medical, social and economic problems facing three West African countries; Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

### *Gender issues*

Bush and Oduro (2006: 361) note that, in Ghana, parents following a traditional gender role stereotype still prefer educating their boys at the expense of girls. The problem is exacerbated by high drop-out rates, caused by an inability to pay fees, and by teenage pregnancy. Drop-out rates are particularly high for girls. In Ghana, 84 per cent of males and 81 per cent of females attend primary school. Participation rates in secondary schools are 83.3 per cent for males and 76.8 per cent for females, a doubling of the gender gap.

The British Council (2012) refers to the 'significant challenge' of gender equality and female empowerment in Northern Nigeria. They add that it is necessary to bring about changes in policies and attitudes that result in more equitable outcomes for girls and women in Nigeria.

Agyepong et al (2012), following documentary analysis, report that sexual harassment of female students is a major problem in senior schools in Ghana, and add that this contributes to the drop-out figures. Similar issues were observed in Benin by Gilmour et al (2007). Similarly, Cuesta and Abras (2013), in considering national statistics, point to the greater opportunities for male pupils in Liberia. The disadvantages for girls are shown through high levels of teenage pregnancy, the occurrence of HIV/Aids, the post-war effects of broken families, the expectation that girls will become home-

makers, and their inability to access funding for education when younger brothers need this provision. Dahn (2008) discusses the inherent sexual violence in schools in Liberia while Stromquist et al (2013: 521) add that these cultural and institutional factors also inhibit female teachers.

These cultural attitudes also limit female leadership in West African schools:

‘In Ghana, women are acutely under-represented in school headship, especially in rural areas. This is largely attributable to the cultural context. Women are considered to be weak and are discouraged from taking up teaching posts in deprived areas’ (Oduro and MacBeath 2003: 445).

However, Aladejana and Aladejana (2005), in a survey of women leaders in South West Nigeria, found that, despite gender-related problems in fulfilling their leadership roles, women were regarded as running better led and managed schools. In contrast, Ibukon et al’s (2011) survey of 100 principals and 500 teachers in Nigeria’s Ekiti state suggests that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of female and male principals.

These various contextual factors combine to make school leadership a demanding and difficult endeavour. The next section discusses the role of the principal.

### **The Role of the Principal**

It is widely accepted that the principal’s role has become more complex and demanding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bush 2013). This is partly due to increasing accountability pressures and the need to produce good student outcomes to enable countries to be competitive in an increasingly global economy. Agezo (2010: 700) shows how these requirements apply in the Ghanaian context:

‘Being a principal in the twenty-first century is a challenging task. To qualify for the job, principals need to be visionaries, instructional leaders, curriculum specialists, disciplinarians, facility managers, public relation experts, legal analysts, technology experts, and counsellors, among others. Principals must possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead their schools. Principals must think strategically, handle multiple ambiguous tasks at once, stay clear and steadfast on fundamental vision and values, maintain integrity and interpersonal sensitivity, and handle stress effectively’.

The author conducted interviews with five female principals and concluded that:

‘The five principals demonstrated their abilities to tap the wishes and needs of teachers, students, parents, district education officers, community members, and resources of their communities to achieve the goals of their institutions. The principals were able to create and sustain an image of what quality schooling might be and worked conscientiously toward its achievement . . . The principals upheld ethical and moral values and developed a learning community in which satisfied personnel were committed to a student-centred and instructionally focused learning environment’ (Ibid: 701).

Oduro (2003: 122-123) considered the role and functions of 20 primary heads in Ghana. His study in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem district shows that all ‘attached’ headteachers (those with class teaching responsibilities) complained about a heavy workload. In rural areas, a shortage of teachers compelled some headteachers to handle more than one class. One headteacher notes that:

‘I have 231 pupils in my school with only four teachers. I’m handling Primary 3 and Primary 5. Quite recently, one of the teachers fell sick and I had to handle that class too. So one person handling three classes and doing administration at the same time . . . how can I be effective?’

Zame et al (2008) cite the Ghana Head Teacher’s Handbook (1994) which outlines the required proficiencies of heads. Five of these relate to ‘Managing your school’ and can be regarded as essentially functional responsibilities:

- managing people;
- managing instructional time;
- managing co-curricular activities;
- managing learning resources;
- managing financial matters.

There are also five proficiency areas identified as ‘improving the quality of learning’:

- increasing school intake and attendance;
- assessing pupil performance;



- assessing teacher performance;
- staff development;
- improving relations between school and community.

Some of these expectations might be regarded as instructional leadership (Bush 2014) but Zame et al's (2008) survey of 1533 heads in Greater Accra led them to conclude that leaders focus mainly on administration, at the expense of visionary approaches:

'Head teachers are engaged in management and administrative tasks. While tasks in these proficiency areas are central to school operation, leadership that is based on a vision galvanizes the collective capacity of personnel to accomplish goals, recognizes the importance of data in decision making, and demonstrates concern for professional growth is critical'.

This essentially managerial leadership role (Bush 2011, Bush and Glover 2013b) is echoed in Besong's (2013: 97) study of fifteen private and fifteen public schools in northern Cameroon:

'the administrative efficiencies of principals in public secondary schools are in the areas of delegation of functions, decision-making, organization of meetings, communication cues, motivation of staff/requisition, protection of school property, management of funds, and general rapport, while those of the principals in private secondary schools were in attendance to work, supervision of teachers, enforcement of rules and regulations, and admission procedures'.

Biamba's (2008) study of the role of principals in Cameroon shows the wide-ranging responsibilities expected of them. Drawing on research in eight secondary schools, he states that tradition, culture and political contexts are 'crucial factors' in understanding how they conceptualise principalship. They are involved with different regional and local services, are concerned with the safety and security of their students, and their day is extended through participation in parent-teacher associations and other community activities.

The World Bank (2012: 7), referring to Liberia, say that 'the leadership of today needs to ensure that future generations will be fully functional, literate and skilled members of society, lest they jeopardise the likelihood of achieving the nation's vision for 2030'.

The collective message from these sources is that school leadership in West Africa is a multi-layered activity, underpinned by expectations which often greatly exceed the principal's capacity and capability. Being expected to provide quality education with limited resources would challenge even the most competent leaders. This also shows the importance of appointing only the best professionals as school principals.

### **Appointment of School Principals**

The recruitment and selection processes are key aspects in determining the effectiveness of schooling. In Cameroon, for example, the appointment of school heads is the responsibility of regional delegations, described by the World Bank (2012) as a nascent form of administrative de-concentration. Ibukon et al (2011) say that principal appointments in Nigeria are more effective when experienced teachers are chosen. According to Donkor (2013), Ghana does not have uniform or well-defined criteria for appointing basic school leaders, leading to animosity among teachers. Moriba and Edwards (2009: 106) claim that leadership appointments in Sierra Leone are subject to corruption, with nepotism, based on tribal considerations, more significant than quality or competence in selecting principals.

Ofoegbu et al (2013: 67) criticise the factors used to select school principals in Nigeria. 'There are no formal requirements for people to be appointed into leadership positions. It is not uncommon for school heads to be appointed on the basis of god-fatherism, political affiliation, ethnicity or some indices of culture or religion'. They conclude that 'educational leadership positions should encompass and be based on merit and certification that demonstrates the potential for good leadership practice' (ibid: 75). Ibara (2014: 684) adds that the appointment of Nigerian principals, who have only teaching qualifications, means that school leadership and management are 'in the hands of technically unqualified personnel'.

Although there is only limited evidence about the appointment process for principals in West Africa, it appears that clear selection criteria are rarely available, leaving open the prospect of personal factors and affiliations being more important than leadership capability when such appointments are made. This has obvious implications for the quality of leadership and for the prospects of school improvement. Given the demands on leaders in West African schools, discussed above, only the most capable professionals should be appointed as principals.

Regardless of the criteria used to appoint principals, specific preparation and development are required if they are to become effective leaders.

### **Leadership Preparation and Development**

The discussion in earlier sections demonstrates the challenging nature of school leadership, and especially the principal's role, in West African contexts. This suggests that specific leadership training is required if principals are to operate effectively in such environments but, in practice, there are few formal leadership preparation or development opportunities. There is an important distinction to be made between leadership preparation, learning which occurs before appointment, and leadership development, training which takes place after accession to headship (Bush 2008). Moorosi and Bush (2011: 71) note that 'many Commonwealth countries focus more on leadership development than on preparation'.

Bush and Oduro (2006: 362) note the preponderance of views among African national and local administrators that good classroom teachers will become effective school leaders without specific preparation. They note that principals are usually appointed without any qualifications or training. In Ghana, for example, longevity of service, or implied 'rank', is a pre-requisite for appointment, although basic teacher training, certification and experience are also required before promotion to headship. Arikewuyo and Olalekan (2009: 73) stress the need for training before potential leaders in Nigerian schools take up service, because 'teaching experience is not the only yardstick'. In a review of literature in Nigeria, they comment on the risks inherent in moving teachers from the classroom to managerial positions. 'The danger here is in promoting an individual from a position of competence to a position of incompetence'. Ibara (2014: 684) makes a similar point, noting that Nigeria's National Policy on Education 'is silent on the training of school principals'.

This view is reinforced by Ibukun et al's (2011) study in Nigeria's Ekiti state. They conclude that appropriate training for principals is required to fill the competence gap between experienced and inexperienced principals. Similarly, in relation to Ghana, Donkor's (2013) research with teachers and school leaders led to the view that the country lacks efficient and effective leadership:

'The study confirmed the inadequate attention that policy-makers . . . give to basic school leadership. The bottom line is that basic school leaders in Ghana need to be equipped with

knowledge and skills in management and leadership to enable schools to improve in performance (Ibid: 1).

Even where training opportunities are available, they may be unfit for purpose. Bush and Oduro (2006: 364) point to the frequent use of a one month induction course, often staffed by people of limited experience, using repetitive and inappropriate teaching styles, and failing to link the training with nationally legislated norms. They also note that the training usually occurs after appointment, leaving new principals unprepared for their responsibilities. Oduro (2003: 309) reports that all 30 participants in his Ghanaian study 'complained that the training was not organised at the right time and should have preceded their appointment as headteachers'.

Zame et al (2008: 117) also comment on the lack of training for heads and aspiring heads in Ghana:

'Currently there is no comprehensive reform initiative that addresses the need to develop head teachers' leadership proficiencies. As it stands, individuals are promoted to the head teacher position without extensive leadership training . . . Without effective basic school leadership, the chances of systemic educational reform, leading to a quality education system, will more likely than not remain elusive.'

Zame et al (2008: 126-127) also point to the relationship between the appointment and preparation of principals, and their subsequent effectiveness, and offer advice which is likely to be equally applicable to other nations in West Africa.

'Excellence in school leadership should be recognized as the most important component of school reform . . . It is important for the Ghana education system (GES) to ensure that those who are promoted to the position of head teacher have the knowledge, skills, and disposition, via professional development, to enable them to create effective schools and craft educational programs that will enhance student academic achievement'.

Arikewuyo and Olalekan (2009: 73) surveyed 235 recently appointed heads in junior high schools in the South and South-West regions of Nigeria, to ascertain their development needs. The overwhelming stated need was for training in the functional areas of personnel, finance and school-community relationships, suggesting that they underestimate the need for instructional leadership, even though they were all appointed on the strength of their teaching service. Oredein's (2010: 62) survey of 1192 teachers in south-west Nigeria showed that the development of decision-making

competence is important for those who will be in crisis-management situations, although he noted that female principals handle such tensions more effectively.

Fertig (2011: 398), referring to an international project to secure Millennium Development Goals in poorer countries, stressed the need for development focused on instructional leadership in Ghana. His research looked at differing approaches to leadership capability within Ghana, where hierarchical and power based superior control led to a lack of agency in decision making on the part of leaders.

Ofoegbu et al (2013: 67) undertook research with 237 people undertaking school leadership training in Nigeria, to ascertain their expectations of skills to be developed in meeting their potential leadership roles. In a powerful critique, they conclude that:

‘The Nigerian school of today is different and much more complex than that of some decades ago. There is very little semblance between the earlier schools and today’s in terms of population, infrastructure and technology, particularly communication technology . . . Leadership in schools is therefore very different and more difficult today than it was two or more decades ago . . . standards of teachers’ performance and students’ academic performance are very much below expectations’.

In order to address these problems, Ofoegbu et al (2013: 75) argue that ‘the contemporary complexity of the internal and external school environment in Nigeria has increased the need for principals to receive effective preparation for their demanding roles . . . Leadership preparation is therefore an important agenda item necessary for charting the path to improved Nigerian schools’.

Bush and Oduro (2006: 373) developed a model for school leadership development in Africa, and conclude that ‘specific preparation is required if teachers, learners and communities are to have the schools they need and deserve’. There are sporadic initiatives to train and develop school leaders but these are often not sustained. Recent examples include the Whole School Development (WSD) programme in the Gambia, which appears to have produced some modest gains (Blimpoy and Evans 2012). The British Council in Sierra Leone conducted a two-day workshop on school leadership in Freetown, geared to equipping school leaders to strengthen the curriculum in their schools. The British Council (2013) states that the school leadership training programme gave these leaders new skills to implement at their schools and motivate teachers to give more in order to improve standards. This claim should be treated cautiously as it is based on a press release.

What may be a more sustainable development programme has been initiated by the Ministry of Education in Liberia. It is planning to establish school management committees at each school and to develop school principals:

‘School principals have the main responsibility for school-level management and the Ministry has prioritised their capacity development . . . the MOE is developing a certification program for school principals. A principal’s training manual has been developed, and the MOE is piloting an in-service training program for principals in six counties’ (Ministry of Education: 184).

The literature collectively shows that appointing untrained principals is widespread in West Africa. However, there is a limited but growing realisation that headship is a specialist role, not simply an extension of classroom teaching. While attitudes are gradually changing, only Liberia appears to have clear plans to develop and certify principals. Developing structured and coherent programmes to prepare school principals is essential to promote school improvement throughout the region.

### **Leadership in Action - Styles and Models**

The wider literature identifies several leadership models and applies them to schools, mainly in developed countries. Bush and Glover (2013b), for example, include managerial, instructional, transformational, transactional and distributed leadership in their typology. Three of these models (instructional, transformational and distributed) are often advocated for their potential to contribute to school improvement, in a range of contexts, including West Africa, as the discussion below suggests.

In the absence of specific preparation, principals have to operate on the basis of what they have learned from their leaders in their previous role as teachers, an ‘apprenticeship’ model. The traditional pattern of leadership within West Africa appears to be based on bureaucracy, hierarchy and managerial leadership (Bush and Oduro 2006). This is also confirmed by Enumene and Egwunyenga’s (2008: 13) survey of 240 teachers in the Delta State of Nigeria.

Adebegsan (2013: 25) surveyed more than 500 teachers and school leaders in Nigeria’s Ogun state and found that ‘the administrative style adopted by the principals was inadequate for effective

school administration . . . Principals' administrative style and approach to teachers were inappropriate and harsh'.

A contrasting approach was reported by Agezo (2010: 699), following shadowing of, and interviews with, five heads of high achieving junior high schools in Ghana's Cape Coast, who advocated an approach based on staff development and professional learning communities:

'The principals were of the view that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities . . . Creating a community of learners requires promoting shared values and developing an appreciation for the value of working cooperatively and caring about one another'.

Four of these principals also stressed a strong and consistent focus on teaching and learning, consistent with an instructional leadership approach. This approach may serve to explain why these schools are 'high achieving', as international evidence (e.g. Robinson 2007) shows that leadership focused on classroom practice is much more effective than traditional managerial approaches.

Similar findings were noted by Nakpodia (2010: 13), in Nigeria's Delta State, who saw greater success where students were involved in decision-making, and by Singh and Manser (2008), who attached importance to the emotional intelligence of Nigeria's potential leaders. Singh (2008: 73) adds that collegial leadership cannot exist without the development of emotional intelligence and that organisations exploring transformational leadership and distributed approaches need this to be fostered. Arikewuyo and Olalekan (2007: 1), also referring to Nigeria, noted that successful schools were led by principals who could elicit and encourage vision building, a key dimension of transformational leadership. However, Moriba and Edwards (2010) note that the transactional approach of the tribal culture in West Africa inhibits the development of transformational styles.

Ofoegbu et al's (2013: 75) survey of 237 Nigerian teachers found that the perceived leadership styles of secondary school principals in Edo State include transactional (32 per cent), transformational (35 per cent), servant leadership (20 per cent) and strategic leadership styles (13 per cent). This led the authors to conclude that 'secondary school principals would potentially benefit from reflecting on their style and seeking to adopt a variety of styles to ensure a good fit with the context and

complexities they need to address', a view which is consistent with a contingent approach (Bush 2011, Bush and Glover 2013b).

Tanaka (2012: 434) stresses that accountability to the hierarchy is paramount in Ghana. 'If the headmaster has a good relationship with the director, and a bad relationship with us, he has no problem' (rural school teacher, cited by Tanaka – op cit.). Similarly, one rural school headteacher won a district award despite only reporting for work twice a week (ibid).

If teachers experience only traditional, top-down, managerial leadership approaches, it is unsurprising that, in the absence of specific training, they reproduce this style when they are appointed as principals. The emerging evidence in West Africa is that learning and implementing a range of leadership styles is likely to be more effective than following the bureaucratic model which is common throughout Africa (Bush and Oduro 2006).

### **Leading Professional Development**

Leadership of learning, or instructional leadership, is a central role for school leaders (Bush 2014, Pont et al 2008, Robinson 2007) but there is very limited evidence on this issue in West Africa. However, Osei (2013: 271) notes that responsibility for learning rests increasingly with local officials, as decentralisation within national frameworks has developed in most countries in the region.

If school principals are to adopt an instructional leadership approach, developing teachers to become more effective classroom practitioners is an essential requirement. Osagie (2012: 28), in a survey of 125 principals in Nigeria's Edo state, found that professional development programmes offered supervision, in-service training, capacity building, seminars, workshops, conferences, fellowship programmes, study leave, retraining and skill upgrading courses. He found that principals are more ready to use supervision and in-service training, rather than use resources for other activities, and that readiness to support professional development is tied to the likely effect on measurable results, rather than to teacher development per se.

Kalule and Bouchanna (2013: 89) considered the views of 106 initial teacher trainers in Nigeria, and suggest that the connections between practice, personal development, understanding and relationships are best fostered by continuing supervision and enrichment, despite the time costs involved.



Teacher retention is mentioned as a continuing problem in West African contexts. Cobbold (2007: 14), following a survey of the Ghanaian education service, concluded that teachers were using in-service leave to provide training for work outside teaching and that this was adding to the wastage that occurred during the first two years of service. Tanaka (2012: 416) notes some specific problems in Ghana. 'Teachers in rural areas in general face numerous challenges. They are materially less well off than their counterparts in urban environments and receive minimal professional support'.

Using interviews with 38 teachers and 10 local officers, discussion groups, and quantitative data from 10 case study schools, Tanaka (2012) details the shortage of trained teachers in an economically backward environment, and the use of untrained staff. Her conclusion (ibid: 435) has implications for the training of head teachers:

'In general, untrained teachers are in a difficult position, having questionable professional preparedness and little financial security. Accordingly, they may feel inferior to their trained counterparts and experience difficulty in developing identity and skills as teachers . . . Therefore, they are in need of greater support and reasonable appreciation if they are to fulfil their duties more effectively . . . However, headteachers are also in a difficult position, and they too need to feel supported if they are to work productively'.

The findings in this section show the challenges faced by principals in improving and developing their teachers. Classroom practice is the most significant variable influencing learner outcomes (leadership is second) and in-service professional development is essential to enhance subject knowledge, pedagogic skills, and classroom management. This is one of the most important roles for principals but, as the literature above demonstrates, being aware of development needs is only the starting point and many principals do not have access to high quality training opportunities for their teachers (or even for themselves).

### **Stakeholder Relationships**

The importance of working with stakeholders to secure school improvement is increasingly recognised and is reflected in some of the literature on school leadership in West Africa. Otunga et al (2008: 375), for example, say that effective leaders in Senegal galvanise their stakeholders to secure support from government, mining interests and NGOs. Similarly, Biamba (2008) says that

working with stakeholders, especially parents and staff, takes up a significant amount of time for principals in Cameroon. In contrast, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (2012: 58) says that, for many public services, there are only tenuous links with the public they are intended to benefit.

In West Africa, stakeholder relationships are often motivated by the need to raise funds to support the limited finance available from the national system. Yamada and Ampiah (2009: 63) report that this imposes heavy burdens on school leaders:

‘In Ghana, the senior secondary education system is funded minimally by the government and depends heavily on cost-sharing by households. Schools charge various kinds of fees, which add up to six to ten times the amount the government has officially approved for the schools to collect from parents or guardians. Moreover, there are costs that are not visible from the surface, but borne by households. Invisible private costs (transport, additional food, incidental expenses) are a few times larger than visible ones (uniform, books and paper), although they are neglected too often’.

### Parents

The requirement for families to contribute to school costs has significant implications for the extent and nature of parental involvement. Sottie et al (2013: 384) consider that this requires a change of attitude from the traditionally passive relationship between parents and schools:

‘Parents have the primary responsibility to support and influence their children’s cognitive, affective, and social development, by participating in their learning activities . . . One reason parents are not effectively involved in individual students’ education is their own inadequate education, and their poor understanding of education as it occurs in the family and in school. Thus, to improve the situation, schools and parents must engage collaboratively, by sharing information, through appropriate programmes in parental education and staff development’.

Sottie et al (2013: 388) say that Ghana’s educational policies should have a long-term goal of integrating parent involvement in schools. They add that it is essential for all basic schools to reach out to parents through PTAs and parent education programmes. Much of this is mirrored by Edet

and Ekegre (2010), in an analysis of the background of school drop-outs in the Winneba district of Ghana. They suggest greater parental involvement to help in securing changed attitudes.

### Governance

In many countries, parental participation is encouraged through the establishment of school governing bodies which represent them and other stakeholder groups. However, there is only limited evidence on governance issues within West Africa. Essuman and Akyeampong (2011: 513), drawing on case study data from Ghana, show that, in rural areas in particular, participation in governance by all strata of society has been inhibited because of the power of the tribal and educated elites and teacher beliefs that they are accountable to the community elders rather than to head teachers or parents. In Cameroon, Biamba (2008) refers to the role of parent-teacher associations while the Liberian Ministry of Education (2010) is planning to establish school management committees. These initiatives suggest a limited but emerging awareness of the importance of governance.

### Teachers

There are frequent references to the inadequacy of the teaching force (e.g. Sottie 2013 in Ghana) and Adayemi and Oyetade (2011) also report on the weak motivation of primary teachers in Nigeria, linked to low pay, often paid well in arrears, limited and inadequate learning resources, and perceived low status. Handling such dissatisfaction provides a difficult leadership and management challenge for principals. Adayemi's (2008: 80) survey of 1200 teachers, drawn from all secondary schools in Nigeria's Ondo State, led him to conclude that 'the level of human resources management by school principals was low', and he recommended that:

'Principals should equip themselves adequately with the effective use of administrative strategies such as effective supervision, monitoring, communication, proper delegation of duty, effective leadership, motivation, and effective discipline to enhance human resources management in their schools. The state government should intensify efforts in training and retraining principals and conducting seminars and refreshers courses for principals, teachers and non-teaching staff on strategies of managing human resources in schools.'

The sources reviewed in this section point to growing awareness of the need for principals to engage with school stakeholders to promote school improvement. However, there is a clear difference between the parental role, often limited to funding schools via fees and other contributions, and

that of teachers, who are paid to serve the school and to develop the learners. These challenges reinforce the complexity of the principal's role and it is little surprise that many feel overwhelmed by the multiple demands they face.

### **Managing Resources - Human, Financial and Capital**

As noted above (Adeyemi 2008), human resource management is perceived to be inadequate in some West African contexts. Besong (2013: 3) refers to Nwagwu's (2004) work, in four regions of Nigeria, who listed four indicators necessary for assessing the quality of output of secondary schools. These are the quality and number of students admitted, the quality and availability of teachers, the quality and quantity of the infrastructure, and the quality and number of managerial personnel, such as school inspectors and supervisors. He concludes that the degree of quality of the identified indicators determines the principal's administrative efficiency, although this view makes little allowance for variables arising from principals' quality or training.

Singh and Gumbi (2009: 249) point to the particular problems of resource management in Nigeria's rural schools, where limited infrastructure, basic resources and technology demand conceptual, interpersonal, technical and political skills. They note that these are problems which test leadership creativity. Odufowokan (2011), and Obadara and Alaka (2010), also referring to Nigeria, point to the availability of resources, the importance of the maintenance of good premises, and the availability of instructional materials, and comment on the relationship between these resources and student achievement.

The pressures of resource management add to the demands facing West Africa's school principals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Providing high quality education with limited resources heightens the challenges facing school leaders.

### **Managing teaching staff**

The management and deployment of teachers is particularly challenging where school organisation requires multi-age groups as reported, for example, by Kivunja and Wood (2012: 94) following research with 12 leaders and six teachers:

‘Interviewees repeatedly cited the dichotomous problem of low enrolments in rural and remote areas, necessitating the combination of two or three grade levels as one class and, at the same time, large classes due to lack of teachers to teach the combined grades and lack of supporting infrastructure. The combination of an amalgam of grades, with many children taught by untrained teachers, tends to commit these schools to poor educational quality’.

Tanaka (2012: 429-430) refers to the challenges of managing the various categories of untrained staff in Ghana. One such problem is that they would not always report for duty, as they would try to make ends meet by taking other jobs. This was exacerbated by the late payment of salaries. A related issue is that many of these teachers perceived external people (programme officers) to be their superiors, rather than the headteachers.

The availability of sufficient suitable resources also influences teacher motivation and retention, as noted by Adu et al (2012: 36), following a survey of nearly one thousand teachers in Nigeria’s Oyo State. This also provides a challenge for school principals in trying to secure such resources as well as trying to promote effective education in multi-grade classes.

The literature discussed in this section illustrates the differences in resources available to teachers and learners in West Africa, compared to developed countries. In an increasingly globalised economy, addressing this problem is important if West Africa’s children are to have a chance of competing with their wealthier peers in Europe and North America.

### **Accountability, Inspection and Evaluation**

As noted earlier, school supervision has been delegated to local officials in most West African countries. However, De Grauwe (2007: 711) points out that the complex mandate for supervision outweighs the scarce resources available in Africa. In addition, the dual obligation for many supervisors to offer support, and to exercise control, two contrasting activities, has led to conflict with teachers. When supervisors visit schools, their attitude can appear to be condescending and their focus is often on administrative control rather than support. Titanji and Yuoh (2010: 21) make similar points in respect of Cameroon and suggest that further training for all staff with supervisory roles is required.

The availability of data for both external inspection and internal evaluation has been investigated by Prew and Quaigrain (2010: 741), in four districts of the Ashanti region of Ghana. The schools and districts concerned make use of a cyclical school performance review system and support this with collection of data, including examination and test results, incident and attendance records, and such subjective data as may be effectively compared across time or between schools. The authors comment that this approach can lead to ownership at school management level, providing the data needed for headteachers to provide leadership for their schools.

Alonge (2006) states that school leaders in Odo state in Nigeria did not monitor or supervise staff performance towards students' acquisition of knowledge and skills and he concludes that self-evaluation is a necessary tool for school leaders.

The data in this section point to the need for school leaders to be accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools, in conjunction with local supervisors. Finding the right balance between internal evaluation, and external supervision and inspection, is an important task for West Africa's education systems.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this paper show that political and socio-economic factors provide a challenging context for school leadership and management in most West African countries. These demands include war, famine, gender issues, religious tensions, and the rural/urban divide, all of which require changed attitudes. The local culture, including male domination, and hierarchical, often tribal, structures, contribute to the pressures facing leaders, exacerbated by the increasing expectations placed on school principals, and by the breadth of responsibilities they face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These burdens have not been accompanied by specific training to enable principals, and aspiring principals, to prepare effectively for their leadership responsibilities. The international evidence (e.g. Leithwood et al 2006, Robinson 2007) shows that leadership accounts for up to 27% of variation in learner outcomes, second only to classroom practice. School improvement rarely occurs in the absence of effective leadership, so specialised learning for principals is an essential requirement.

Probably because of the lack of specific training, school principals do not exhibit a range of leadership styles and approaches. They tend to operate as administrative and managerial leaders,

neglecting the instructional, transformational and distributed approaches which are increasingly advocated in the literature, as a consequence of persuasive international research. Linked to the predominant managerial approach is a focus on formal accountability to the hierarchy, rather than answerability to school-level stakeholders, despite the evidence that parents, in particular, increasingly contribute to school funding.

The review shows that little is known about school governance, or leadership for learning, in West Africa, despite the wider international evidence of the significance of these aspects of schooling. Further research is required to address these knowledge gaps.

If West African education systems are to approach the standards achieved in wealthier contexts, improvements in classroom teaching and leadership are required. Specific development programmes should be provided for school principals, and aspiring principals, as soon as resources are available. Such programmes should go beyond the formal expectations of governments to include awareness of instructional, transformational and distributed approaches, as well as traditional managerial leadership. Developing instructional leadership capacity and capability is particularly important as this will enable leaders to contribute to improving classroom teaching, a practice which serves to enhance the impact of leadership on student outcomes.

The literature review was prepared in 2013 during a period of considerable change in Africa. Civil war continues in some areas, such as Sudan, Jihadist groups have become resurgent in Northern Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya, and variations in oil and commodity prices have affected national incomes in many countries, including Nigeria and Cameroon. Several West African countries have also been affected by the impact of the Ebola outbreak in 2014. These developments inhibit progress towards the achievement of universal primary education and the development of educational potential throughout the region. Developments within South Africa and Botswana, for example, show that, given political stability, leadership development can promote more effective education as measured by literacy levels, school leaving examination pass rates, and increased participation in secondary and higher education. Proving specialist leadership and management training for current and prospective principals would make a significant contribution to educational standards throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

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